There is a clear national need to develop the talent of the more than 3 million high-ability learners in the

SUMMARY POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- CEC supports the passage of The Strong Start for America’s Children Act of 2015 (S. 1380 and H.R. 2411) which will assist states and communities to increase the availability of early learning opportunities for all young children, including children with disabilities. CEC urges Congress to dedicate 5% of authorized funding for this new program to each of IDEA’s Early Intervention Program (Part C, serving children birth – 2 years) and Preschool Program (Part B Section 619, serving children ages three – five).

- CEC supports the passage of a dedicated funding stream, as included in S. 1380, within a reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

- Federal funding for IDEA’s Early Intervention and Preschool program must substantially increase to keep pace with the number of children and families who rely on services.
BACKGROUND

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provide early intervention and preschool services to over 1 million infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities and their families, a 45% increase over the last 20 years.

IDEA’s early childhood programs decrease the need for special education services once in Kindergarten, support developmental progress, and prepare children to thrive in their education with necessary services & supports.

Stagnant federal funding has meant 40% fewer dollars per preschool child with a disability, over the last 20 years. In fact, funding per child has hit a 28-year low for preschoolers with disabilities.

While these services – known as Early Intervention and Special Education – are individualized to meet the needs of each child, they all share common goals of improving developmental, social, and literacy and numeracy outcomes. Research has demonstrated that intervening at the earliest age can improve outcomes for children with disabilities as they enter into kindergarten and progress in their education. In fact, studies have found a number of long-term cost savings such as decreased grade repetition, reduced special education spending, enhanced productivity, lower welfare costs, increased tax revenues and lower juvenile justice costs.

IDEA’s early childhood programs, IDEA Early Intervention Program (Part C) and Preschool Program (Part B Section 619) have demonstrated positive results for children, their families and society. In fact, over 75% of children who receive IDEA’s early childhood programs show greater than expected growth in three domains: knowledge & skills; social relationships; and taking action to meet needs, according to analysis by the Early Childhood Outcomes Center.

The Council for Exceptional Children supports the Strong Start for America’s Children Act (S.1380/H.R. 2411), legislation to expand early learning opportunities for children from birth through age five. While this legislation takes a bold and critical step forward, CEC – together with others in the disability community – urges Congress to recognize that with newly expanded preschool opportunities, it is likely that more children will be identified as needing special education services.

Therefore, CEC recommends that the Strong Start for America’s Children Act be amended to include a 5% funding set-aside for IDEA’s Preschool Program; and a 5% funding be set-aside for IDEA’s Infants and Toddler’s with Disabilities Program. This complimentary investment will help ensure that children receive the services needed to ensure their full participation in these inclusive early learning opportunities.
Strong Start for America’s Children Act of 2015  
(S.1380/H.R. 2411)

Introduced by Senator Murray (D-WA) and 23 co-sponsors, Congressman Hanna (R-NY)  
Congressman Bobby Scott (D-VA)

The purposes of this subtitle are to:

- (1) establish a Federal-State partnership to provide access to high-quality public prekindergarten programs for all children from low-income and moderate-income families to ensure that they enter kindergarten prepared for success;
- (2) broaden participation in such programs to include children from additional middle-class families;
- (3) promote access to high-quality kindergarten, and high-quality early childhood education programs and settings for children; and
- (4) increase access to appropriate supports so children with disabilities and other children who need specialized supports can fully participate in high-quality early education programs.